

**National Infant Immunization Week April 22-29, 2006**

**Love them. Protect them. Immunize them.**

**Working together with Vaccination Week in the Americas**

**Vaccination: an act of love**



### **Sample Op-Ed**

## **Protecting Children's Health Through Immunization**

We all want the same things for our children. We want them to know they are loved, and we want them to grow up happy, healthy and safe. To keep them safe, we put them in child safety seats, install childproof door latches, and teach them to look both ways before crossing the street. To keep them healthy, we dress them warmly, wash their hands, and make sure they eat their vegetables. We do many things for our children, but one of the most important things we can do to protect their health is to make sure they are vaccinated on time every time.

We are lucky that we live in a time when there are few visible reminders of the suffering, injuries, and premature deaths caused by diseases that are now easily preventable with vaccines. Today, there are tens of thousands of children who are alive and healthy who would have died of infectious diseases before vaccines. Most of these children would have died before age two. Few of us, even health care providers, have ever seen the diseases that were once commonplace. But that wasn't always the case.

In the 1950s polio was a national obsession. Parents wouldn't let their children swim or attend summer camp for fear of polio. Nearly everyone knew someone disabled by polio. 2005 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first safe, effective polio vaccine. Thanks to Dr. Jonas Salk's vaccine, polio is just a distant, unpleasant memory for most of us. We no longer fear a disease that once brought so much suffering.

During the fifty years since the polio vaccine was first introduced, we have made great progress in protecting our children against disease. Vaccines are truly one of medicine's greatest triumphs. We can now protect children from 13 potentially serious vaccine-preventable diseases. Before vaccines these diseases were common, causing hundreds of thousands of cases, and hundreds of deaths each year in the in the United States.

Today, the world is free of smallpox; polio has been eliminated from the Western Hemisphere and we are on the verge of eradicating polio from the world community; rubella, once a major cause of birth defects, has been eliminated in the US; and diseases and death from diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, hepatitis B, and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b are at or near record lows.

As guardians of the future, we all have a stake in children's health. No child should have to suffer and possibly die from a vaccine-preventable disease. We have the means to protect all of our nation's children against these terrible diseases. We must use those means to ensure that no child suffers needlessly.

Parents and healthcare providers must work together. Parents should make and keep appointments to ensure their child is up-to-date on all shots. They should become informed consumers and ask

questions of their health care provider. Parents should keep a record of each immunization visit and they should ask their health care provider about their child's shots at every visit, even if they think their child is up-to-date.

Physicians should talk with parents about why immunization is important, and answer questions about vaccine risks and benefits. Every visit should be seen as an opportunity to vaccinate and reminders should be given to parents when immunizations are due.

The promise is great for a world where all children have a chance for a healthy start to life. But we must remember there was a time not long ago when children suffered and died from diseases that we can now easily prevent. We must not let that time return. Love and protect our children by vaccinating them on time every time.

**Note to editor:** *National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW), April 22-29, 2006, is an annual observance established 12 years ago by the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to remind parents, health professionals, and the public that children deserve a healthy start to life by immunizing them against vaccine-preventable diseases.*

*For the third year NIIW is partnering with Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA) to promote infant immunization in all countries of the Americas. More than 500 events will take place nationwide to celebrate and promote this important issue.*